



Ambitious Local 121 opens in old Dreyfus Hotel

01:00 AM EDT on Wednesday, June 13, 2007

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The dining room at Local 121, above left. The feeling is Old World elegance with lighting and oversized banquettes to match.

State Senator Joshua Miller, owner of Trinity Brewhouse, has an ambitious new restaurant — Local 121. It's named for its goal to cook with "local" ingredients and its address at 121 Washington St.

The restaurant is part of a landmark preservation project led by AS220. The arts organization bought the 24,000-square-foot former Dreyfus Hotel in 2005 and renovated it into an affordable live-and-work space for artists, with an art gallery on the ground floor and Local 121.

The hotel, built in the 1890s on Washington and Mathewson Streets, served as a Johnson & Wales University dormitory from 1975 until 2000, and had been vacant ever since.

Construction revealed some elaborate details that create a unique and lovely dining room and bar. Plaster work at the entrance area was exposed by construction and makes a dramatic first look into both dining room and lounge. In that lounge, an elegant bar was protected by Formica during the dorm days and is back to its original luster. Stained glass windows make the place look divine. In the dining room, a feel of Old World elegance is enhanced with lighting and oversized and rounded banquettes.

Several folks have walked in and shared memories of the place when it was the Dreyfus Hotel, Miller said. One woman told him “This was the place for me to have a nice date,” while another woman told him it was the first place her father ever remembers having dinner out. He’s found old menus and postcards from the Dreyfus days, too.

On each table, a bottle of water awaits guests, a homage to when it was the Café Parisienne.

” explained Miller. “They say, ‘We’ve been waiting for you,’

In the kitchen is chef Julia Moore, a graduate of the Culinary Institute of America who has trained in New York, San Francisco and Seattle, and also worked on the Bravo reality TV series Top Chef. She most recently cooked at La Laiterie in Wayland Square.

Her menu will include small plates and full entrees and will star local bounty, changing as seasonal ingredients become available. How local is local? Pork shank is braised in Sakonnet Vineyard’s wine. Pan-seared Bomster scallops come from Stonington, Conn. Local clams are steamed with beer. The eggs and milk come from Rhody Fresh. Prima Pasta from Middletown is a supplier.

With all of New England so close the bounty from the entire region is easily viewed as local. Wolfe’s Neck beef from Maine and red meat from Vermont producers are part of the ingredient list. Cold River Vodka in the bar comes from Maine.

“The restaurant will be a tribute to what is great in Rhode Island,” said Miller. He said jonnycakes are on the small-plate menu. He also wants cocktails to be based on Rhode Island lore and they are working on creating a coffee cabinet drink.

Miller’s team includes Tree Callanan, who handles events and marketing. Miller said a large restored dining room and bar in the lower level will be available for community groups to use for events. Behind decorative mirrors sit peg boards that can be used for meeting displays and there’s a projection screen in the room.

Also on the Local 121 team is a forager, Dana Berge. Berge, a recent Brown University grad, has a passion for urban agriculture.

When Berge heard the name forager, she cracked up for five minutes and then embraced it.

She is the liaison between farmers and restaurants. While Moore is busy in the kitchen, Berge is out harvesting chamomile and picking up lettuce and turnips. She works with Red Planet Vegetables who are based at Urban Edge Farm, a part of Southside Land Trust. While she takes their vegetables, they take a compost pile created by restaurant scraps. So much of the food need not be thrown away. Rather it can be piled up for better, natural farming.

As for the local commitment, Berge said, “We don’t want to just say we go with them because they’re local but because it’s local and good.”

Local 121, 121 Washington St., Providence, is open for lunch and dinner. (401) 274-2121,
www.local121.com.

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